CATACLYSM AND DEMORALISATION IN SVETLANA ALEXIEVICH'S SELECT WORKS

A SYNOPSIS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Svetlana Alexandrovna Alexievich was born in Stanislav, Ukraine on 31 May 1948. Her father, Aleksandr Alexievich, was Belarusian and her mother, Yevgeniya Alexievich, was Ukrainian. She grew up as the oldest sibling with two other children in a family that faced abject poverty before gradually accomplishing a modest life according to Soviet standards. As a child, she developed a keen interest in creative writing and accomplished recognition for her poetry and features that were published in the school paper. Post school education, she started her career as a reporter with a local newspaper in the town of Narovl, as experience in the field was a pre-requisite for higher studies during the time. In 1967, she joined the Department of Journalism at the Minsk University and completed her graduation in 1972. During her study at university she won several prizes at the republican and all-Union competitions for her scholarly work.

1.1. Alexievich's Distinctive Narrative Technique

Alexievich gained admiration for her unique polyphonic writing style which included interviews with real people during the main events of that period because she believed that it enabled the reader to get a closer understanding of the reality alongside preserving the originality of content. Alexievich was outspoken and did not refrain from expressing her views in opposition to the Belarusian political regime. She was subject to scrutiny for expressing her opinion about Presidents Vladimir Putin (Russia) and Aleksandr Lukashenko (Belarus) and for challenging the official narrative. Apart from being branded as a traitor and accused for defamation and slander, she had to face exile twice. In 1989 her book *Zinky Boys* [1], which was titled after the Afghan war in which dead soldiers returned in zinc coffins, became a topic of dispute. Alexievich was indicted for desecration of the soldiers' honour. She was tried several times between 1992 and 1996 for writing about the deaths of soldiers in war. Belarusian literature witnessed the suppression of several writers like Ivan Bunin, Boris Pasternak and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn; all targeted for opposing the Soviet regime. Their books were banned besides being forced to renounce prestigious awards like the Nobel Prize and imposing banishment. [2] Despite challenges like exile and interdiction of her books, she never stopped writing in her own style and eventually won the Nobel Prize in 2015

making her one among the 14 women in the world to receive the prestigious award. She achieved international prominence for her written work and acquired several other literary awards, particularly the Kurt Tucholsky Prize (1996), the Leipzig Book Award for European Understanding (1998), the Herder Prize (1999), the Sandro Onofri Prize (2002), the National Book Critics Circle Award (2005), the Oxfam Novib/PEN Award for Freedom of Expression (2007), and the Prix Médicis Essai (2013), as recorded in the Encyclopedia Britannica database. In 2019, Alexievich was elected as the chairman of the Belarusian PEN Center.

1.2. Select Works for Study

Four of her most distinguished works have been taken up for study: *The Unwomanly Face of War* (1983*), Zinky Boys – Soviet Voices from the Afghanistan War (*1989), *Chernobyl Prayer* (1997) and *Second-Hand Time* (2013). *The Unwomanly Face of War* is Alexievich's first book that she decided to write when she realized that she had grown in a place surrounded by women who had participated in the Second World War. After years of interviewing several Soviet women who took part in the great patriotic war, she observed that though women had contributed majorly in the war as captains, snipers, tank drivers, pilots, nurses and doctors they were not celebrated as much as the menfolk. [3] *Zinky Boys* reverberates the voices from the Afghan war: soldiers, doctors, widows and mothers share their perspective and how it affected families. *Chernobyl Prayer* is a painful record that chronicles two parallel catastrophes: 1. Technological and 2. Social. She juxtaposes the meltdown of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant with the fall of socialism in the Soviet Union. [4] *Second-Hand Time* is considered to be Svetlana Alexievich's masterpiece and relates to the stories in Enchanted by Death. It depicts life during and after the Soviet Union. [5]

1.3. Predominant Themes

Cataclysm and demoralisation are predominant themes in Alexievich's polyphonic narratives. Polyphony in Literature is evident when emphasis is evenly distributed on all characters who express dissimilar views and yet coexist in a specific period of time or occurrence whilst having a common goal. Alexievich wanted to merge authorial voice with usual chronologies and contexts, to approximate the voices that she heard as a child when the women in her village gathered in the evenings to reminisce events of the second world war and their survival. Being born in Ukraine after three

years of the war had ended and being brought up in Soviet Belarus where the Nazis had exterminated Jews, Gypsies and Slavs, Alexievich had a sound comprehension of cataclysm and demoralisation. Human suffering is an inexorable phase of life which must be confronted with diligence to survive and flourish rather than embracing a meaningless existence by ruminating on the cataclysm that caused demoralisation. D.H. Lawrence's [6] famous lines from *Lady Chatterly's Lover,* reiterates that life must go on despite all tribulations. He writes:

> Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically. The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins, we start to build up new little habitats, to have new little hopes. It is rather hard work: there is now no smooth road into the future: but we go round, or scramble over the obstacles. We've got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen.

Pain and suffering are of different magnitudes and the impact may vary according to the nature of the catastrophe. Physical injuries are comparatively easier to treat than moral injuries caused by amputations, loss of loved ones and belongings or dislocation. Writers across the world for centuries have tried to capture human emotions in different genres and writing styles. However, the works produced by many writers were mostly an interpretation or projection of episodes through the author's viewpoint; thus, the characters were mere images or representations of the author's ideologies. Few writers, like William Faulkner, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, Fyodor Dostoevsky, James Joyce and Svetlana Alexievich used polyphony as a writing style in their works. Polyphonic writing technique provided scope for several characters to express their views in a similar setting or scenario. Though most of the above-mentioned writers embraced the plurality of voices, it was Svetlana Alexievich who used it to record the testimonies of real-life characters in the form of unaltered monologues, sans the author's influence. During her speech in the award ceremony when she received the Nobel prize, Alexievich declared, "This is how I hear and see the world—as a chorus of individual voices and a collage of everyday details. This is how my eye and ear function. In this way all my mental and emotional potential is realized to the full. In this way I can be simultaneously a writer, reporter, sociologist, psychologist, and preacher." [7]

The researcher aims to analyse the severity of demoralisation caused by cataclysmic episodes correlated to human made and natural disasters. Emphasis is laid on the polyphonic writing style that creates a cathartic effect through the testimonies of

real-life victims and survivors. The psychological turmoil and suitable psychological interventions to treat emotional and physical impairment through verified theories and therapies were extensively studied, to substantiate the arguments and to justify the thesis statement and hypothesis. Comparisons from diverse literary genres were assimilated to corroborate that several artists have strived to promote peace and harmony as a sensible alternative of violence and bloodshed. Novels, poems, plays, songs and paintings were explored to prove that cataclysm causes demoralisation and disarrays the welfare of civilisation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature that reverberates the chaos of war and disaster have been judiciously reviewed and incorporated to corroborate the dominant themes of cataclysm and demoralisation in Alexievich's works. Scholarly research works from diverse nations were analysed to examine predominant themes in the works of Svetlana Alexievich.

2.1. Analysis of Scholarly Research on Alexievich's Works

Kelina Gotman, Senior Lecturer in Theatre and Performance Studies in the English Department at King's College London, and Hölderlin Guest Professor in Comparative Dramaturgy at the Goethe-Universität Frankfurt published an article titled "The Time of Philosophy (with Svetlana Alexievich)" in the scopus indexed journal *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* in 2019. She uses a philosophical approach to recreate an imaginary conversation with Alexievich. This illusory conversation is set between two timelines: 1940s and the late 2010s where Gotman [8] projects a quiet choreography to understand, "taboos of philosophical discourse: confession, 'personal life', memoir, love, family relations, doubt, fear, audience, and the time and place of writing, to arrive at a bare space of philosophical address, where nothing much happens except time passing." [8]

Professor of English Literature, University of Sheffield, Sue Vice published an article in the *Journal of Culture and History* in 2022 on the topic "Holocaust testimony or 'Soviet Epic': Svetlana Alexievich's Polyphonic Texts" in which she discusses the wartime fate of the Jews in Belarus as depicted in Svetlana Alexievich's documentary fiction. Vice [9] analyses the reports of survivors, rescuers and bystanders to evaluate whether the utterances in the works of Alexievich represent the voices of the Jews distinctively or if it is viewed from a western perspective as part of the Soviet history.

In her examination of Alexievich's *Last Witnesses,* Vice notes, "Among the child's-eye accounts in Last Witnesses, which concern the experience of separation from family members, evacuation, German violence and partisan activity, are two that directly address the fate of the Jews and its genocidal reality, along with other passing allusions." Vice [9]

Aliaksandr Novikau from the Department of Politics and International Affairs, Northern Arizona University, US, published a research article in the journal *Media, War &* Conflict in 2017. It was titled, "Women, Wars and Militarism in Svetlana Alexievich's Documentary Prose" and discussed the contributions of women in militia. About Alexievich's works, she observes that,

> Although only one of Alexievich's writings from her magnum opus – the grand cycle of books Voices of Utopia – is explicitly devoted to women in wartime, essentially many of her creations analyse war from gender perspectives. Her honest and raw books are based on carefully documented eyewitness accounts of the scariest things that can happen to people in horrific wartime situations. Novikau [10]

Novikau details on how Alexievich accentuates the discrepancy between the official Soviet accounts of the glorious wars and the true versions of the horrors that were involved in the oral history genre. "Svetlana Aleksievich: The Writer and Her Times" is the Editorial introduction published in 2017 for the *Canadian Slavonic Papers* by Heather J. Coleman, Associate Professor in the Department of History and Classics, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada. In an overview about Alexievich's works, the editor portrays Alexievich as a writer and as a chronicler of her times. Coleman's [11] opinion is that "The exploration of Aleksievich's intellectual genealogy is intimately connected with the question of genre in her work. Her unique form of creative non-fiction has been characterized as literary non-fiction, documentary prose, documentary novel, "epic-choral prose," or, by Aleksievich herself, as "novels in voices." In 2020, the Indiana University Press released a volume of the journal titled *History & Memory* in which Helga Lenart-Cheng, Associate Professor at St. Mary's College of California has published a research article on "Personal and Collective Memories in the Works of Svetlana Alexievich". Cheng [12] assesses the Nobel Prize-winning journalist Svetlana Alexievich's methodology in the greater context of post-Soviet debates about collective remembering. Cheng focuses on "the relation between individual and collective remembering, specifically, on what it means to remember together, through individual voices and stories. I discuss three different ways to

conceptualize collective memory: “collectivized,” “complementary” and “contested” memories.” Cheng [12] argues that contestation, is the most suitable paradigm for Alexievich’s work, because it is in accord with her Bakhtinian principles of polyphonic writing and remembering.

Apart from research articles, theses and dissertations on Svetlana Alexievich which have been submitted as part of master’s degree and doctoral degree were identified to comprehend the research gap before proceeding with further research. In 2015, Saini Sonu from the Department of Slavonic and Finno-Ugrian Studies at the University of Delhi submitted her doctoral degree dissertation on “History Genre and Narrative Voices from the Soviet Utopia and the Oeuvre of Svetlana Alexievich.” She traces the anthropology of human history, analyses key concepts related to Russian history and geography narratives. Sonu’s [13] focus is on the composition and writing style of Alexievich. However, the reach of her thesis is limited because it was published in Russian language which eventually confines the scope for interpreting and delving into her research. Liubov Kartashova from the University of South Carolina submitted a thesis in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Comparative Literature. Her thesis which was published in 2020 was titled, “The Deconstruction of Patriarchal War Narratives in Svetlana Alexievich’s *The Unwomanly Face of War.”* Kartashova [14] examines how the Soviet construct included the participation of the female faction in the second world war and the silencing of women’s war experiences that followed by manipulating a reality in which women’s trauma did not exist. She elaborates on the identity crisis, experience of shame and consequential self-censorship. Kartashova, further asserts Alexievich to be a champion of the unspoken female contribution in war. She writes,

> In *The Unwomanly Face of War* (1985), Svetlana Alexievich acknowledges these neglected experiences and traumas, and creates a space in which women’s stories have a right to exist. Applying Jean Elshtain’s theory on the lack of attention to women in combat as well as Carolyn Heilbrun’s ideas on the importance of enunciating experiences of oppressed women, I proclaim Alexievich to be a spokeswoman for female war witnesses.

Although women took part in military activities and replaced the men in every sector of the workforce to meet the economic needs of the country during war, these women were considered as mere substitutes and were forced to return to their stereotypical roles like cooking, sewing and cleaning. Kartashova’s emphatic advocacy

of women's roles and the portrayal of gender segregation is commendable. Iryna Hniadzko from Brown University submitted her dissertation on the topic, "Svetlana Alexievich: Fiction and the Nonfiction of Confessions" as a partial fulfilment of her doctoral degree program in 2018. Hniadzkos research focused on Alexievich's precursors asides assessing the authenticity in the testimonies that were compiled by Svetlana Alexievich post interviews of the victims. She suggests that the identities of the people who shared their personal experiences and trauma could have been altered to avoid repercussion. Hniadzko [15] states, "It seems to us that it would be fair if people who shared their pain and suffering with the writer as well as the people who read about that suffering, knew that these words were artistically altered and reassembled, and were presented under new or altered names." Another research scholar, Anna Karpusheva, submitted her dissertation on Alexievich at the University of Kansas in 2020. The topic of her research is "Fighting a War: Svetlana Alexievich's Prose between History and Literature" and was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. She focused on three works of Alexievich *The Unwomanly Face of War* (1983), *Last Witnesses* (1985), and *Boys in Zinc* (1990) to examine individual experience of two Soviet wars: World War II and the Soviet-Afghan War. Karpusheva [16] aimed at demonstrating how the use of performative genres as narrative frames allows Alexievich to interact with her interviewees and readers. She declares,

> I maintain that with these performative collaborations between interviewees and readers Alexievich honours individual and collective traumas of war and presents them as verbal monuments to human suffering during Soviet-era wars. Her texts strive to demolish foundational Soviet mythologemes of World War II and to force readers to reassess their vision of the Soviet past and its impact on the post-Soviet present.

Karpusheva details on the life before and after the fall of Soviet union and contrasts the longing for the communist ideology as opposed to new order and reality that the Soviet people had to adopt.

2.2. Contemporary War Fiction that Resonate Themes of Cataclysm and Demoralisation

War fiction as a genre, portrays the chronological occurrences of events leading to combat and often reiterates the vainness of warfare. The consequential impact is nothing but destruction and wastage of resources, disabling nations and civilisations

from progress. *War and Peace* is a novel by the Russian author Leo Tolstoy, which was first published serially, then published in its entirety in 1869. It is Tolstoy's magnum opus and considered as one of the finest literary achievements and remains a classic of world literature. The novel annals the French invasion of Russia and the impact of the Napoleonic era on Tsarist society. Ben Fountain's satirical debut novel *Billy Lynn's Long Half-Time Walk* [17] explores the abysmal national disconnect between the war at home and the war abroad. Fountain's novel thrives to stitch together a confused, heroic soldier's wayward stream of consciousness with his comrades' ability to talk glibly and persuasively. This novel is closely associated with Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* because of the similarities in theme and characterization.

Erich Maria Remarque's work *All Quiet on the Western Front* [18] is a definitive anti-war book written by a veteran of the First World War. The story is narrated exclusively through the experiences of the young German recruits and emphasizes the tragedy of war through the eyes of individuals. Another anti-war book that resonates with Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* is *Covenant with Death* [19] written by John Harris. It deals with the Great war or World War I which was meant to end all wars thereafter, on the contrary, it turned to be the biggest massacre of its time in which one million men perished at the Battle of Somme. However, the war ended with no clear victor, proving the futility of war.

Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* [20] is a novel published in 1940 which is about the Spanish civil war which entranced artists, writers and activists who saw the war as a portend to global turmoil. Hemingway deploys the fear of modern armament as opposed to the ancient art of war which emphasized fair combat, sportsmanlike competition, and the true spirits of hunting. *Gone with the Wind* is yet another compelling epic novel written by Margaret Mitchell [21] that depicts the impact of war on civilians. Devastation, dejection, mental disability caused by tragic events and thwarted lives are themes found in the novel which strike a parallel with Alexievich's war books which also brings to light the suffering of civilians affected by war and catastrophe. The nuclear spill and war affected the public to an extent where they had to struggle for their basic needs. *The Quiet American* is a novel written by Graham Greene [22] which highlights the plight of soldiers who fought in the second Vietnam war. It was published in 1955 and was perceived to be anti-American. Greene's projection of episodes explains anti-war perspective just as Alexievich who uses a polyphonic writing style which aims at instilling anti-war perceptions. William

Boyd is one of the few writers who discusses men and women as equals. He does not refrain from writing from the female point of view like Alexievich in her novel *The Unwomanly Face of War*. Smart and skilled women are most often subjected to exploitation and humiliation. Restless is a novel by Boyd which tells the story of a Russian woman named Eva Delectorskaya. She is lured into believing, by Lucas Romer, that her brother was killed while working for an undercover British organisation which aimed at destroying the Nazi regime.

*Doctor Zhivago***,** a novel written by Boris Pasternak [23] is much like *War and Peace* and *Gone with the Wind* which narrates the episodes of the period from the revolution of 1905 to the outbreak of World War II, as recorded in Russian history. There are manifold stories to be told within the main plot, primarily of the titular protagonist, but the threat and reality of war is always close to the surface. The novel is set in Russia between the years prior to World War I and the Russian Civil War of 1918-1922. It was published in 1957 and gained popularity in the west, but it was banned in the Soviet Union for decades.

Svetlana Alexievich discusses the ordeals that children faced during calamities such as war and Chernobyl disaster. Some of them were orphaned and homeless because of war, they grew up to live wretched lives while the others were killed or maimed permanently. Anecdotes of still born babies and deformed babies because of the radiation spill caused by the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl worsened the scenario. Alexievich has documented the monologues of affected children who have been robbed off the little joys of childhood. Anti-nuclear sentiment was widespread in 1980's with authors writing about the repulsive effects on mankind. *When the Wind Blows* by Raymond Briggs [24] is a graphic novel in which Jim and Hilda Bloggs completely trust their government in rule to protect them in the event of an impending enemy attack. However, it was not like World War II that they expected but rather a technological invasion using nuclear weapons. It was a conflict that the ageing couple could vividly recall with all the consequences of nuclear fallout and public misinformation. *La Débâcle* is a novel by Émile Zola [25] published in 1892, the penultimate in *Les Rougon-Macquart* series. It was translated in English as *The Debacle* and gained popularity because it unapologetically highlights the brutality of war on ordinary soldiers and the civilians left behind. The novel explains why the Second Empire ended in humiliating military defeat and radical violence. It focuses on ordinary soldiers, showing their bravery and suffering during circumstances they cannot control.

Alexievich's works demonstrate that while wars and disasters change through time, the resultant carnage and destruction remains the same. Khaled Hosseini's [26] *The Kite Runner* is the first novel by an Afghan American author. It was published in 2003 and weaves around the story of Amir, a young boy from Kabul. The story is set against a backdrop of chaotic events, from the fall of Afghanistan's monarchy through the Soviet military intervention, the exodus of refugees to Pakistan and the United States, and the subsequent rise of the Taliban regime. *The Kite Runner* is a modern examination of warfare on individuals, societies and nations; told through the eyes of two friends Amir and Hassan. Ford Madox Ford's [27] tetralogy of novels, *Parade's End* is about the cataclysmic events of World War I, both on the individuals characterised in the books and the society as a whole. *Parade's End* is set during and after World War I highlighting themes related to the breakdown of Edwardian culture and the painful emergence of a new world with a new set of values.

Wilfred Owen's [28] poems like "Dulce et Decorum Est", "Anthem for Doomed Youth", "Strange Meeting", "Spring Offensive" and "Insensibility" have gained immense popularity as they highlight the callous nature of war and the plight of an entire generation of 'doomed youth'. Owen's own experiences of shell shock made him uniquely qualified to address a condition we now recognise as post-traumatic stress disorder. The narrator in the poem "Insensibility" muses on the consoling oblivion of the condition: "Happy are these who lose imagination."[28] The phrase echoes the state of 'drowsy numbness' Keats [29] articulates in "*Ode on a Nightingale*".

2.3. Literary Characters in War Fiction

Fictional characters in war fiction have become synonymous with certain psychological anomalies. Among the myriad characters in English literature suffering shell shock, Septimus Smith suffers rather ostentatiously and schizophrenically in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. In the novel *Return of the Soldier*, Rebecca West's Chris Baldry suffers from amnesia, like Ford Madox Ford's Christopher Tietjens from the *Parade's End*. Amir in *The Kite Runner* is caught in the web of guilt and redemption like other war survivors who merely manage to stay alive. Other shell-shocked soldiers include the fictional Billy Prior and the fictionalized Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon in Pat Barker's prize-winning *Regeneration* trilogy who are similarly overtly traumatized. George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* is a historical account of the Spanish Civil War; a struggle that Orwell was engaged in first-hand. It was published

in 1938 and was classified as a book-length war diary. For seven months from December 1936, Orwell served in the socialist party named '*Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista'* (POUM) [17] militia fighting Franco and fascism. Renowned playwright, William Shakespeare's three plays that make up his Henry VI trilogy known as Harry the Sixth, The Houses of York and Lancaster and The True Tragedy of the Duke of York cover the period of the War of the Roses. Shakespeare's perceptive on the tragedy and revulsion of war was an early prediction of a degenerating civilization, which the intervening centuries have failed to realize.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

Key objectives of the research are listed below:

- To delve into catastrophic episodes that wreak havoc upon victims and survivors in a comparative study of life before and after catastrophe.
- To analyse the polyphonic narrative technique incorporated by the author in the works selected for this research.
- To explore dominant themes of trauma, dislocation, suicide, gender stereotyping, harassment, and Soviet reforms in relation to massive disruption.
- To identify the symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression, PTSD, and demoralisation caused by cataclysm.
- To examine the theories and therapies available for the treatment of long-term moral injury.
- To apply appropriate psychological interventions like Positive psychology to overcome demoralisation dejection.

4. RESEARCH GAP AND METHODOLOGY

4.1. Examining the Knowledge Gap

Alexievich's narrative technique and representation of voices from diverse group of people were identified as the most researched topics by authors of recent times. While several studies highlighted key themes like anguish, subjugation of women, Soviet life and the oeuvre of her documentary prose, the researcher attempts to use a psychological approach to decode the themes of demoralisation and devastation caused by cataclysm and other consequential long-term effects. Besides focusing on tracing

the origin of problems associated with moral injury, the current research attempts to identify the knowledge deficit in the awareness of psychological interventions available for emotional wellbeing. Apart from examining the political, economic, social, and topographical aspects that are linked to the subject of the study, the research also aims at creating sentience about psychological welfare in the literary realm. Using a multi-disciplinary approach, by drawing an inference based on the inter-relation between Literature and Psychology, the researcher justifies the selected title and the content. Literature often deals with characters and human actions that decipher their fate. Psychology on the other hand proposes to understand the psyche of humans to interpret behavioural patterns. Identifying the interconnectivity of these two domains has aided in the progress of the research and in ascertaining the goal of this thesis. The methodological limitations and theoretical framework have been investigated in adherence to expected research standards.

4.2. Deductive Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative research methodology is implemented for the analysis of the descriptive data in the primary and secondary sources. The research content is structured using a deductive approach where generalised predicaments are discussed elaborately before narrowing down to more specific monologues presented in the primary source. Literary non-fiction can be challenging to interpret but the monologues that were presented by actual people based on true incidents make it more memorable. While some claimed that Alexievich's oral histories can leave the reader dispirited, others, like the researcher, are able bridge the knowledge gap to interpret her works productively in an attempt to pave way for new learnings and suggestions and to alleviate the damage caused by man-made disasters. Despite the pessimistic nostalgia in the narrations of Alexievich's works, there is scope for further research to promote world peace. Background research was carried out to substantiate the arguments placed by the researcher in an attempt to prove that the study is relevant to the contemporary period. Since the researcher works in the employment sector to assist culturally and linguistically diverse refugee cohort who have fled war with hopes of finding a better life in Australia, it was accessible to assess some cases relevant to the research with the endorsement from the management. Interviews have also been conducted directly with victims of war and terrorist attacks to prove that man-made disasters, asides natural disasters are ongoing and therefore, suitable coping strategies should be implemented

to help survivors of catastrophic incidents. Limitations in terms of availability of resources that reflect an interdisciplinary approach to conflict resolution was identified during the course of the research. The political exile of the author and the banning of her books added to the limited scope for new discoveries.

4.3. Psychological Perspective

Psychologists across the world propounded several theories which focused on: Biological Perspective, Cognitive Perspective, Behavioral Perspective, Psychodynamic Perspective, Humanistic & Existential Perspective and Community-Cultural Perspective. Although these theories were able to analyze the reasons behind demoralisation, they were insufficient in providing solutions to the affected. During the 1950s, humanist thinkers such as Carl Rogers, Erich Fromm, and Abraham Maslow helped renew interest in areas that focused on happiness and the positive aspects of human nature. While many other branches of psychology tend to focus on dysfunction and abnormal behavior, positive psychology is centered on helping people become happier.

Kendra Cherry [30], a psychosocial rehabilitation specialist, psychology educator, and author, in her article, “Can Positive Psychology Make You Happier?” suggests that, “Positive psychology can have a range of real-world applications in areas including education, therapy, self-help, stress management, and workplace issues. Using strategies from positive psychology, teachers, coaches, therapists, and employers can motivate others and help individuals understand and develop their personal strengths.” Therefore, victims and survivors of disastrous incidents can adopt positive psychology to overcome traumatizing experiences.

According to Brinton, [31] the victimized populace continues to suffer because they fail to appreciate the happier aspects of life; “Half of happiness is the recognition that we are happy; and half of misery is the forgetting how many causes of happiness we have.” he writes. Carnegie [32] shares similar views in his work, *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* where he declares that, “The secret of being miserable is to have the leisure to bother about whether you are happy or not.” Carnegie not only offers solutions to break the worry habit but also suggests measures to conquer worry situations altogether, from his own experiences and realizations. Such timeless practical advice is proposed by numerous philosophical writers to encourage the distraught and panic-stricken, to break free from the shackles of shock, caused by cataclysm. Although

there are several therapies and treatments for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), referred to as shell-shock during the first world war, and moral injury, the lack of awareness of such methods and the inhibitions caused because of insecurities in veterans, who were once strong and mighty and now slighted away, act as obstacles to progress. There is a colossal gulf or a disconnect between available treatments and the people who could benefit from these therapies, due to ignorance. This research work suggests that cataclysm and its consequent demoralisation can be overcome with positive psychology and by making this obtainable to those who are distraught. Thus, reiterating the thesis statement which proclaims that:

- **Thesis Statement:** Svetlana Alexievich's books depict themes of cataclysm and demoralisation pertaining to man-made disasters with a special focus on the irrevocable impact on individuals and families.

The primary sources used in the study are *The Unwomanly Face of War, Zinky Boys: Soviet Voices of the Afghanistan War, Chernobyl Prayer* and *Second-Hand Time*. The researcher has extensively analysed the select works alongside using a strategic approach to interpret the prevalent themes. Secondary sources such as reference books related to psychology and literature were collected from several libraries like SCILIT at The American College in India and Cumberland council libraries at Sydney. The researcher has extensively analysed online sources like articles from renowned academic journals such as American Journal of Public Health and other journals that have been peer-reviewed and indexed in Scopus, Google Scholar, and Web of Science to ensure high academic standards to maintain credibility and reliability. Search terms related to PTSD, positive psychology and other psychological interventions to treat demoralisation caused by cataclysm were used to locate relevant articles in Journal Storage (JSTOR). Appropriate sources were selected based on their citation frequency and publication date to ensure the data's relevance and accuracy.

A detailed study of authentic online databases like The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), World history organisation, National Centre for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Psychiatry Organisation, American Psychological Association (APA), Positive Psychology Centre and Military History Organisation was corroborated to substantiate the justifications and arguments in this research. Interviews of refugee cohort from Australia was conducted alongside reviews, news reports, and articles from recognized sources such

as Healthline, New York Times and The Guardian. The information collected from these resources was duly cited and acknowledged in the reference section.

4.4. Scope for Further Research

Human behaviour is a complex theory, therefore with changing times newer approaches are required to understand human psyche and to decode the concepts of demoralisation caused by catastrophic episodes. This research opens avenues for further research within the scope of literature, psychology, philosophy and its interconnectivity. Furthermore, disaster management, coping strategies in terms of socio-political dimensions, cultural narratives, historical patterns, environmental damage, ecological effects, ethical and philosophical considerations are areas that can be explored comprehensively. In conclusion, this research provides valuable insights into the psychological impact of war and disaster on humans using a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach.

5. ORGANISATION OF THESIS

The entire research is categorized into six chapters each aimed at focussing on a specific approach which seamlessly transitions into a holistic and factual compilation of intellectual ideas.

Chapter 1 comprises the introduction to Belarusian Literature with some references to Russian Literature because Alexievich is a Belarusian author who writes in Russian language. The author's biography, unique polyphonic narrative style, dominant themes such as impact of war, disaster, civil unrest, dislocation, death, amputations, suicides, trauma and concepts related to cataclysm and demoralisation in her books and primary works have been discussed in detail. The thesis statement and the hypothesis are also included alongside the objectives and framework of the search.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to Literature Review with a focus on authors whose literary works were related to war and disaster. A general overview of war fiction and the dominant themes discussed across literary genres is highlighted in this chapter to justify that catastrophic episodes cause psychological trauma and mass disruption in human civilization. Concepts of cataclysm and demoralisation are examined extensively for better comprehension of the progress in the study.

Chapter 3 is about psychological devastation where the researcher applies a psychological approach to interpret the primary texts. Prevalent symptoms like insomnia, recurrent dreams, suicide, dejection, loneliness, identity crisis and substance abuse that are associated with demoralisation and lasting moral injury are discussed to establish social consciousness of mental health anomalies caused due to the manifestations of disastrous or tragic occurrences.

Chapter 4 discusses theories in psychology to comprehend human psyche especially after catastrophic incidents. Apart from tracing the origin of diverse psychological interventions to treat stress, anxiety and PTSD, it also proposes therapies and remedial interventions for mental health and wellbeing. The researcher attempts to bridge the knowledge gap between understanding mental disorders and implementing available interventions to treat psychological abnormalities effectually.

Chapter 5 reiterates the findings of the study with emphasis on the impact of disruption, mass annihilation and possible solutions to cope with trauma. An interrelation between various fine arts like movies, music and visual arts are identified to prove that artists across all creative genres have attempted to promote world peace in a similar attempt like Alexievich, by exposing the hideousness of human made follies which are often a forbidden topic of discussion.

Chapter 6 is the concluding chapter which justifies the title of the research. A brief summary of the preceding chapters is included. The hypothesis and thesis statement are addressed while discussing the limitations and suggestions. Scope for further research is suggested in the conclusion which ends with two rhetorical questions to contemplate on how people can live harmoniously in a safe world.

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